***The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn***

***Chapter 28:***

***Synopsis:***

Mary Jane is saddened about the separation of the slave families. Huck decides to tell Mary Jane about the stolen money and his confederates and has her take an oath of secrecy. She promises to visit the Lothrops for a few days while the plan unwinds. He tells her to let the auction continue because it also will not work. He gives her a piece of paper to let her know that the money is in the coffin. He tells her sisters that she's gone to help out with the mumps. After the auction, something really strange happens. Two other gentlemen show up at the steamboat and they claim to be the brothers of Peter Wilks.

In one sense, the key question is- where is Huck's real conscience? This chapter shows how Huck, under certain circumstances, is not afraid to act. In fact, he takes a lot of risks in exposing the Duke and the King, including violence against himself and against Jim. It is obvious that he loves Mary Jane and has put her and her family ahead of his welfare.

### ***Analysis***

[Huck](https://www.coursehero.com/lit/The-Adventures-of-Huckleberry-Finn/character-analysis/#Huck) sees Mary Jane crying, and he asks her why. She says it is because the slave family has been split up. After Huck makes a slip of the tongue, he decides to tell Mary Jane the truth. He then instructs her to leave town for the day so he can have time to get away. Huck mentions that someone else's fate—Jim's—hangs in the balance. If Mary Jane were to tell on the duke and the king, she would not be able to pretend she does not know the truth.

Huck sees the sisters, and he tells them Mary Jane left to attend to a sick friend. They ask questions about this and Huck is able to manipulate them into thinking they must keep quiet about the circumstance.

The auction takes place that day. In the middle of the auction two men arrive: Harvey and William Wilks, the real heirs.

In this chapter there is further evidence of [Huck](https://www.coursehero.com/lit/The-Adventures-of-Huckleberry-Finn/character-analysis/#Huck)'s growing maturity. He is attracted to and intrigued by Mary Jane. She is the most sympathetic female character in the book. Not only does Huck find her attractive—describing her as beautiful on multiple occasions—but he respects her and says her word is worth more "than another man's kiss-the-Bible." Huck is touched when she says she will pray for him. He says he has thought of her since then "many and a many a million times." While Huck does not act on his attraction, his recognition of Mary Jane is part of his growth.

Mary Jane's concern for the slaves is reminiscent of Huck's concern for [Jim](https://www.coursehero.com/lit/The-Adventures-of-Huckleberry-Finn/symbols/#Jim). She is distraught at the thought that the slave family has been broken up. In fact, her happiness is dampened by the thought. When speaking to Mary Jane about the plan Huck indirectly mentions [Jim](https://www.coursehero.com/lit/The-Adventures-of-Huckleberry-Finn/character-analysis/#Jim). Like her, Huck is worried about the slave's predicament. He has no choice but to stay with the duke and the king for fear of what might happen to Jim.

***Critical Study(Ch 27-28):***

The same evening, [Huck](https://www.cliffsnotes.com/literature/a/the-adventures-of-huckleberry-finn/character-analysis/huckleberry-finn) sneaks downstairs to try and hide the bag of gold. The front door is locked, however, and when Huck hears Mary Jane coming, he is forced to hide the gold in Peter Wilks' coffin. Because so many people are in the house, Huck does not have the opportunity to retrieve the money.

The funeral proceeds, and Huck realizes he does not know whether the gold is still in the coffin or if someone else has discovered it. After the funeral, the king announces that the estate will be sold in two days. The daughters appear to accept the sale until the king breaks up a slave family and sells them to different traders.

Mary Jane cannot bear to think of the separated family and the mother and the children never seeing one another again. Because he wants to comfort her, Huck blurts out that the slave family will see each other in the next two weeks. When Mary Jane promises to leave the house if Huck will tell her how he knows this, Huck tells the entire story of the king and the duke and how they have fooled everyone.

Mary Jane wants to tar and feather the con men immediately, but Huck reminds her of her promise and explains that "I'd be all right; but there'd be another person that you don't know about who'd be in big trouble." She honors her promise, and Huck gives her a note that explains where the missing gold can be found. The other daughters are confused about Mary Jane's absence, and the confusion grows when two more men arrive claiming to be Harvey and William.

In Chapter 27, [Twain](https://www.cliffsnotes.com/literature/a/the-adventures-of-huckleberry-finn/mark-twain-biography) extends his satire to the pomp and circumstance surrounding the funeral service of Peter Wilks. The dark humor of the funeral scene is evident with the actions of the undertaker and the comical interlude of the dog and the rat. When the service is interrupted by the noise of the dog, the undertaker solves the disturbance and then proceeds to tell the mourners that "*He had a rat!*" Huck's following comment that "there warn't no more popular man in town than what that undertaker was" is yet another satiric barb directed at the subject of death.

In contrast to the burlesque humor of the funeral and its concerned mourners, Chapter 28 serves to establish Mary Jane's sense of compassion, an important example for Huck to follow. In witnessing her reaction to the plight of the slave family, Huck learns another valuable lesson about the humanity of slaves and their close familial bonds. The scene provokes memories of [Jim](https://www.cliffsnotes.com/literature/a/the-adventures-of-huckleberry-finn/character-analysis/jim)'s own claim that he will steal his children out of slavery in order to preserve his family. More important, the scene forces Huck to act based on both his instincts and his conscience. Not only will he tell the daughters where to find the gold, he will also tell them of the entire scam so that the slave family will not be separated.

Huck's decision to help the daughters should not be overlooked. To this point, Huck has generally aligned himself with tricksters and con men; he displays, after all, all of the huckster qualities that the duke and the king use. When the duke and king dupe the people of Bricksville, Huck feels no remorse because the town is morally void and generally squalid. When the duke and the king con the Wilks daughters, however, Huck is outraged and realizes he must intervene, regardless of the consequences.

One of the more powerful human statements is the act of sacrifice, and Huck's resolve to help the daughters illustrates the change that has come over his character. His decision to act foreshadows the novel's climatic moment in Chapter 31.

Glossary

**smouch** steal.

**melodeum** melodeon; a small keyboard organ.

**erysipelas** an acute infectious disease of the skin or mucous membranes caused by a streptococcus and characterized by local inflammation and fever.

**consumption** tuberculosis.

**harrow** a frame with spikes or sharp-edged disks, drawn by a horse or tractor and used for breaking up and leveling plowed ground, covering seeds, rooting up weeds, etc.

**muggins** a fool.

***Summary:***

* Mary Jane is upset about the slaves being sold (families were broken up).
* Huck, overcome by her misery and, more importantly, her beauty, breaks down and confesses everything to her.
* Together they devise a plan. Or rather, Huck devises a plan and Mary Jane goes along with it.
* The plan is, Mary Jane goes for the night to stay with Mr. Lothrop, because the girl's got the poker face of a five-year-old with a sugar high. (In other words, she wouldn't be able to hide her emotions from the duke and king.)
* Huck says someone else's life hangs in the balance here (Jim), so he needs time to escape before the situation plays out.
* Later that night, Mary is going to sneak back to the house and shine a candle in the window. If Huck doesn't show up, he's escaped, and she can blow the whistle all she wants on the two frauds.
* Huck then takes a piece of paper and writes down "Royal Nonesuch, Bricksville," so the duke and king can pay their dues for that little scam as well.
* He also writes a note about the money being buried in the coffin, and tells her not to look at the paper until she's already on the road to Mr. Lothrop's.
* So, Mary Jane is off—and Huck runs into the other sister, Susan.
* He doesn't want to trust someone else with the details, so he just makes up a story about the [mumps](http://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmedhealth/PMH0002524/), a really horrible strain called [pluribus-unum](http://coins.about.com/od/uscoins/f/e_pluribus_unum.htm) mumps.
* Lie, lie, lie: in the end, he makes sure Susan isn't going to say anything to the duke and king about her sister's absence, since she doesn't want to delay their trip to England with their uncles while everyone sticks around to see if Mary Jane contracted *pluribus-unum* mumps.
* And then two men show up: the *real* brothers of the dead Peter Wilks.
* Oops.

***Critical Analysis:***

The next morning, Huck finds Mary Jane crying in her bedroom. All her joy about the trip to England has given way to distress over the separation of the slave family. Touched, Huck unthinkingly blurts out that the family will be reunited in less than two weeks. Mary Jane, overjoyed, asks Huck to explain. Huck feels uneasy, for he has little experience telling the truth while in a predicament. He tells Mary Jane the truth but asks her to wait at a friend’s house until later that night in order to give him time to get away, because the fate of another person ([Jim](https://www.sparknotes.com/lit/huckfinn/character/jim/)) also hangs in the balance. Huck instructs Mary Jane to leave without seeing her “uncles,” for her innocent face would give away their secret. Huck leaves her a note with the location of the money. She promises to remember him forever and to pray for him. In retrospect, Huck tells us that he has never seen Mary Jane since but that he thinks of her often.

Shortly after Mary Jane leaves the house, Huck encounters Susan and Joanna and tells them that their sister has gone to see a sick friend. Joanna cross-examines him about this, but he manages to trick them into staying quiet about the whole thing. Later that day, a mob interrupts the auction of the family’s possessions. Among the mob are two men who claim to be the real Harvey and William Wilks.

***Detailed analysis(Ch27-28):***

These chapters mark several milestones in Huck’s development, as he acts on his conscience for the first time and takes concrete steps to thwart the schemes of the duke and the dauphin. Although Huck has shown an increasing maturity and sense of morality as the novel has progressed, he has been tentative in taking sides or action, frequently hedging his bets and qualifying the statements he makes. He has chosen not to challenge or expose the duke and the dauphin even though he has been aware from the start that they are frauds. Earlier, watching as the con men scam the Wilks sisters in Chapter 24, Huck tells him that the sight makes him ashamed to be part of the human race. Though this strong statement is, in itself, a step for Huck, he does not act on it until now. The first concrete action Huck takes is his retrieval of the $6,000 in gold, which he places in Wilks’s coffin.

Despite these developments, however, Huck still has several lessons to learn and still struggles with the conflicting messages he receives from society and from his personal experiences. Even though Huck rightly takes the money from the con men, he does not give it to the Wilks sisters directly, and he still cannot bring himself to expose the con men to the Wilkses. It is not until two chapters later that Huck, seeing Mary Jane crying in her bedroom, blurts out that the duke and the dauphin are frauds. Also, Huck seems relatively unfazed when he hears that the dauphin’s plan to liquidate the Wilks’s property will require the separation of a slave woman from her children. Huck confesses to Mary Jane not because he is upset about the splitting of the slave family but because he feels bad that she is upset about it. Twain implies, through Huck’s struggle with the issue, that the attitudes and assumptions that enable racism and slavery in the South are deep-seated and difficult to overcome. Although Huck has made great strides, he still struggles to make sense of the confusing world around him. His predicament is understandable: after all, a world in which both seemingly good people (Miss Watson) and clearly evil people (the duke and the dauphin) are willing to perpetrate great cruelty—separating a mother from her children—is a confusing world indeed.

[Read more about the mixed blessing of money and wealth.](https://www.sparknotes.com/lit/huckfinn/themes/)

Although these chapters are generally serious in tone, Twain maintains his characteristic mix of absurdity, suspense, humor, and biting cynicism throughout. The funeral scene is one of Twain’s brilliant comic set pieces, complete with screechy music, blubbering mourners, and a smarmy undertaker, all of which enable Huck to make wry observations about human nature while he sweats out the fate of the money he has hidden in the coffin. Then, the climactic appearance of an alternate set of Wilks brothers at the end of Chapter 28 sets the stage for more absurdity and confrontation. The remarkable mix of serious social commentary and entertaining suspense and humor is what Twain is perhaps best known for—and what has made *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* such an enduring work.

***Summary and Analysis Part by Part:***

***Summary Part 1:***

[Huck](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/the-adventures-of-huckleberry-finn/characters/huckleberry-finn) comes upon [Mary Jane](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/the-adventures-of-huckleberry-finn/characters), who is packing for her trip to England. She is also crying because, in selling the [Wilks](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/the-adventures-of-huckleberry-finn/characters)’s slaves, the [duke](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/the-adventures-of-huckleberry-finn/characters/the-duke-and-king) and [king](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/the-adventures-of-huckleberry-finn/characters/the-duke-and-king) separated a mother from her children. Moved by her tears, Huck blurts out that the family will be reunited in two weeks, and, thinking that in this case the truth is better than a lie, he says he can prove it.

***Analysis Part 1:***

It is maybe because Huck recognizes just how big Mary Jane’s heart is here—she is crying out of an empathy with the slaves—that he decides to trust her with the truth, as he trusts only Jim. Huck’s trust in Mary Jane makes telling the truth practical.

***Summary Part 2:***

[Huck](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/the-adventures-of-huckleberry-finn/characters/huckleberry-finn) reveals that the [duke](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/the-adventures-of-huckleberry-finn/characters/the-duke-and-king) and [king](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/the-adventures-of-huckleberry-finn/characters/the-duke-and-king) are not [Mary Jane](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/the-adventures-of-huckleberry-finn/characters)’s uncles but rather a couple of frauds. Mary Jane indignantly wants to have the duke and king tarred and feathered. Huck says he would tell on the duke and king immediately except that he would be endangering someone ([Jim](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/the-adventures-of-huckleberry-finn/characters/jim)), and he proposes a different plan.

***Analysis Part 2:***

Huck has grown up enough at this point that he discourages Mary Jane from immediate action, which would be efficient and practical, in favor of a course of action that is maybe less efficient but more sensitive to Jim’s condition and needs.

***Summary Part 3:***

[Huck](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/the-adventures-of-huckleberry-finn/characters/huckleberry-finn) tells [Mary Jane](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/the-adventures-of-huckleberry-finn/characters) to go away, because he is afraid that she will express in her face knowledge of the [duke](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/the-adventures-of-huckleberry-finn/characters/the-duke-and-king) and [king](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/the-adventures-of-huckleberry-finn/characters/the-duke-and-king)’s fraud, which will in turn allow the two to escape. Mary Jane is to return in the evening, after Huck and [Jim](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/the-adventures-of-huckleberry-finn/characters/jim) have made their escape, and expose the duke and king, sending for the townspeople of Bricksville, the site of the performance of The Royal Nonesuch, as witnesses regarding the duke and the king's trickery. Huck also gives Mary Jane a note explaining where he has hidden her bag of gold. Mary Jane promises to remember Huck forever and pray for him, and, though Huck says he has not seen Mary Jane since, he thinks of her often.

***Analysis Part 3:***

Mary Jane has a strong sense of justice, one that in its earnestness and self-consistency strongly contrasts with that of society at large, but it is precisely the strength of her feeling that makes her a liability in exposing the duke and king. Unlike Huck, she does not have the freedom of character that would enable her to dissemble, or act, as Huck does, and so she would give the duke and king a chance to escape.

***Summary Part 4:***After [Mary Jane](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/the-adventures-of-huckleberry-finn/characters) lights out, [Huck](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/the-adventures-of-huckleberry-finn/characters/huckleberry-finn) runs into her sisters. Huck lies that Mary Jane has gone to visit a sick person in town, and, though the girls press Huck on the facts of his story, he at last tricks the two into not mentioning anything to the [duke](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/the-adventures-of-huckleberry-finn/characters/the-duke-and-king) and [king](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/the-adventures-of-huckleberry-finn/characters/the-duke-and-king) that might alert them to Mary Jane’s knowledge of their fraudulence.

***Analysis Part 4:***

Huck may decline to tell Mary Jane’s sisters the truth because he doesn’t trust them sufficiently, or maybe because it is more practical for only one sister to know the truth, so that there are fewer people who could tip the duke and king off, even accidentally, that their cover has been blown.

***Summary Part 5:***Later that day, the [duke](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/the-adventures-of-huckleberry-finn/characters/the-duke-and-king) and king hold an auction to sell off the [Wilks](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/the-adventures-of-huckleberry-finn/characters) estate. As the auction draws to a close, a steamboat lands, and a noisy crowd approaches, singing out that in their company are none other than two men who claim to be [Harvey](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/the-adventures-of-huckleberry-finn/characters) and [William Wilks](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/the-adventures-of-huckleberry-finn/characters).

***Analysis Part 5:***

The duke and king are astonishingly able to get away with auctioning off the Wilks estate despite the suspicion Dr. Robinson cast on them. The townspeople are so taken by the con men that they only test their assumptions when directly contradicted.